

# Social Media and Law Enforcement: Tweeting from the front line

By **ISE Bloggers**

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Last week, ISE staff attended the Social Media and Law Enforcement conference (SMILE) in Dallas, TX. We learned a lot about the successes and challenges that our law enforcement mission partners are discovering as they use social media to share information with the public and each other. We also live tweeted from the conference and a trip to a Dallas Police Department information sharing center (see picture at right) on [@shareandprotect](#) <sup>[4]</sup>.



Social media is an important channel for information sharing between law enforcement and the public, citizens and the government, or interested citizens and each other. It's a uniquely democratic, two-way communication that has proven critical in emergencies, even terrorist incidents, by linking concerned parties quickly and effectively.

## Engaging with Minnesota

Kara Owens from the Minnesota State Police kicked off the conference with a presentation about engaging the Minnesota public on [Facebook](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, [Twitter](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, and [YouTube](#) <sup>[7]</sup> with interesting stories, urgent notices, and helpful warnings. We loved the idea of Trooper Tales: weekly fun, off-beat stories from troopers on Facebook. Kara also successfully used YouTube and Twitter to publicize the importance of seatbelts after two fatal car crashes were missed by the media.

## Social Media in a Crisis

[Superintendent Mark Payne](#) <sup>[8]</sup> from the UK gave a great keynote about encouraging his officers to share information with their communities on social media. He used Twitter effectively during the riots in Southampton in August to dispel rumors and keep the public informed (many national news headlines were pulled straight from his tweets!). He pointed out that Americans may trust our officers to carry weapons, and yet often don't trust them on Twitter. Train and then trust. Read more of Mark's ideas and experiences using social media in a crisis on [this blog post](#). <sup>[9]</sup> (The SMILE Conference's Officer Squeezy is below right on Pennsylvania Avenue.)



## Key Lessons

Finally, many conference speakers stressed some key lessons learned:

- Start engaging with your public on social media now so that when you need to get your message out quickly in a crisis, you will already have credibility and your audience will already be listening.
- Social media is just another way to communicate with the public ? so it can be great for community policing. Law enforcement can receive more tips, build relationships, communicate directly with the public, and dispel rumors.
- Use hashtags during big events to share information with the broadest possible audience.
- When phones are down in an event or crisis, Twitter and Facebook still work. One presenter pointed out that some in New York learned about the earthquake in Washington DC a full 30 seconds before it hit because they were on Twitter.
- People like the police! One of the biggest surprises to many was the strong positive reaction and appreciation they received from the public when they started sharing information on social media.
- Pack extra batteries. When rapidly responding to citizens on the front line, you'll run low at the worst time!

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Tue, 10/04/2011

## Reference:

[Officer Safety in Indian Country ? Reversing a Deadly Trend](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

[Information Sharing Success: FBI and state fusion center partner apprehend armed and dangerous fugitives](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[The world of state and local justice information systems: Lessons from the NAJIS Conference](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

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